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CRITICAL SHOPPER | Y-3

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Marilynn K. Yee/The New York Times

By Mike Albo

Feb. 28, 2008

AT least twice a year, a fashion reporter will write an article about “The New Modesty,” declaring that clothes are finally returning to well-constructed tailoring of subtlety and restraint. Then, in the same publication, you will see a fashion spread of an impossibly chiseled man in a python codpiece straddling a Russian supermodel wearing a bikini made of pink dental floss, and you

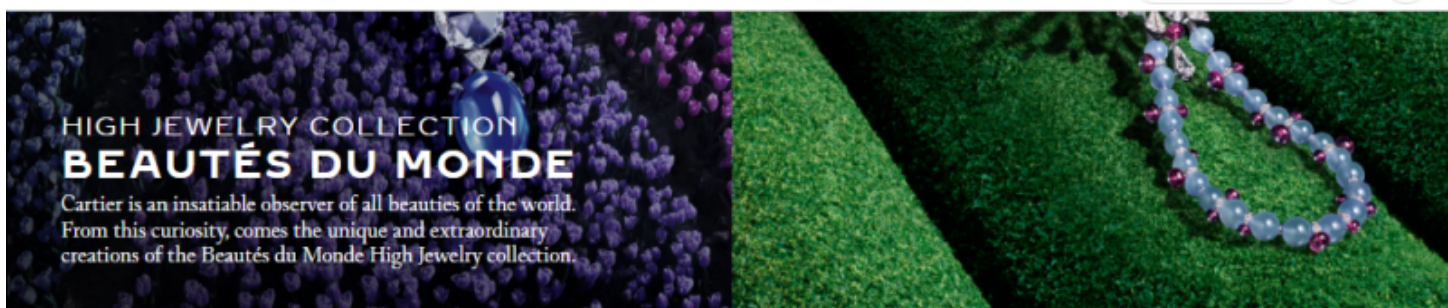
“The New Modesty,” declaring that clothes are finally returning to well-constructed tailoring of subtlety and restraint. Then, in the same publication, you will see a fashion spread of an impossibly chiseled man in a python codpiece straddling a Russian supermodel wearing a bikini made of pink dental floss, and you wonder (1) what that writer was on; and (2) if humanity will ever be sophisticated again.

Well, dear reader, I may be about to make the same mistake because — guess what? The New Modesty is finally here! At least it seems as if it is — in the window of the new, sharply cool Y-3 store in the West Village.

Behind its glass-paneled garage door, a faceless male and female mannequin are displayed. The male form is in a baseball cap, sensible-fitting jacket and knee-length shorts that have retro baseball uniform pinstripes. The female wears a capped-sleeve blouse, a long skirt with floppy pockets and a wide-brimmed gardening hat. At a glance, you could mistake them for a humble Amish couple in the Pennsylvania Dutch countryside, or an international D.J. team boarding a plane to do a gig in Reykjavik, or both at the same time.

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Nearly all the clothes here are like this — effortlessly cool, but quiet about it. Near the entrance, I found a miniskirt in coffee-brown denim-bonded leather (\$1,454), along with a matching skort (\$1,708) and jacket (\$1,981). They were durably ugly-pretty, with the texture of a cowboy rain slicker. Sure, they are insanely expensive, but they would likely withstand years of wind, hail and spilled cocktails.

Gleaming on a table was a pair of gold metallic high-tops (\$490) that looked as if they were designed for a stroll on the surface of Mars. They were complemented by a windbreaker (\$1,047) made of an aluminum-polyester blend that was cool to the touch and floated on the hanger, airy and near-invisible.



Marilynn K. Yee/The New York Times

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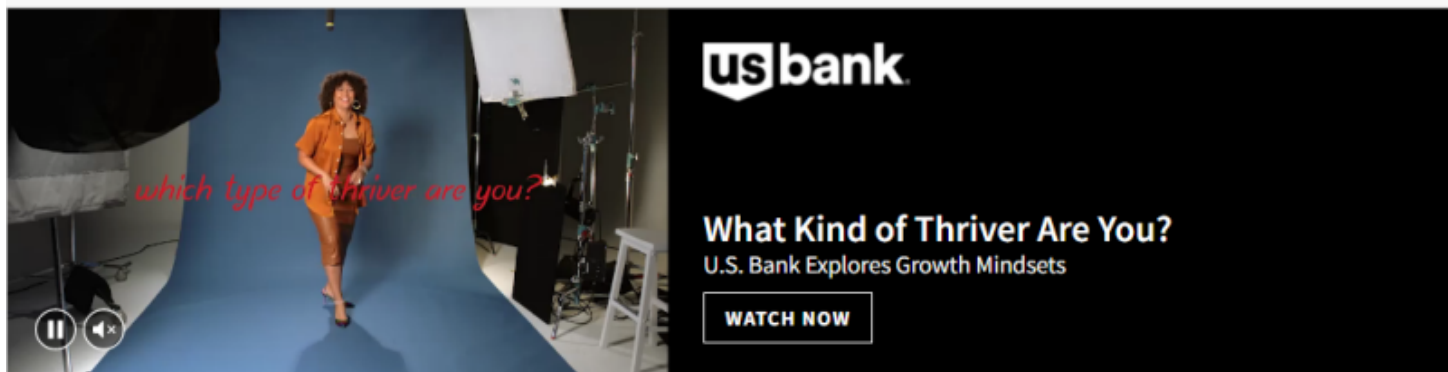
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The clothes here emit a futuristic hum. I kept touching and examining things, thinking I might find some secret teleportation button on them. They are functional and amphibious, as if they had time-traveled from a globally warm future-world where the weather is wet and unpredictable and people live in floating cities that look like airport departure hubs designed by Zaha Hadid.

Y-3 is a collaboration between the Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto and the athletics empire Adidas (The Y stands for Yamamoto, and the 3 represents the three signature stripes of the Adidas logo). Since its introduction in 2003, the line has mixed Mr. Yamamoto's precise tailoring and experiments in design with the techno-fabrics and athletic functionality of the sports brand to make genre-breaking hybrid-garments: high-heeled sneaker-pumps, sweatshirt tuxedo jackets, windbreaker suits. Once you come here, you will never look at warm-ups the same way again.

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Yohji Yamamoto's own line of clothing sometimes makes you feel as if you are too stupid to understand it, but the Y-3 collaboration gives the designer a healthy set of limits for his ideas to have more popular appeal. (A new store of Yamamoto's clothes is down the street from Y-3, so you can compare and contrast for yourself.)

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THE boutique, Y-3's first free-standing store in New York, just opened in February. The men's and women's collections are divided evenly along opposite walls, with bags, accessories and shoes between them.

As I walked through this bright narrow light-box of a store, I was tempted many times to dig myself deeper into debt, first by buying a henley that had a cotton inner lining and outer layer of gray gauze fabric (\$238). It felt like the perfect travel companion. Close by was a gray short-sleeved shirt with a priestlike collar (\$150) that would be great for the ashram I would need to go to after being evicted from my apartment.

As with any fertile crossbreeding experiment, there are some unfortunate mutations here: the exclusive series of white "I Love NY" T-shirts (\$185 for men's, \$158 for women's) look like something you would find on Canal Street. The denim sneakers, also exclusive to the store, are a little homely, and have a \$500 price tag that only a crazy sneaker fanatic would tolerate. A women's double-tank, for \$243, was something only Christy Turlington would feel free to perspire in.



Marilynn K. Yee/The New York Times

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A black short-sleeved shirt with Velcro fasteners looked like a hip surgical shirt (\$225). It scared me, because I could imagine being at some blue neon-lighted warehouse party and seeing Vincent Gallo wearing it and glowering at me with his penetrating, predatory gaze.

But for the most part, the clothes are amazing. Now that everybody is as nervous about their credit as I am, this kind of thoughtful, well-designed, functional clothing could become the standard-bearer of sportswear. Maybe people will be wanting something more sophisticated than flimsy outfits made of feathers and cotton candy, which are available just around the corner in any number of clothing stores in the meatpacking district.

My biggest temptations here came in the form of a beautiful black leather hooded jacket with perforated lining (\$1,615) and a black M65-style lightweight windbreaker (\$419). Although I am not sure I will be able to afford them (or much else here) in my lifetime, I think I have finally found the clothes that I want my stem-cell clones to wear in the future, because I don't want them dressing like floozies. I just hope they don't acquire my lousy credit rating.

Y-3

317 West 13th Street (Gansevoort Street); (917) 546-8677.

WHY? The first New York space for the collaboration between the avant-garde Japanese designer Yohji Yamamoto and Adidas, this sleek boutique is stocked with clothes that will probably still look cool in 3008.

WHY NOT? Though these high-fashion garments take their inspiration from gym clothes, this is not a good place to shop for them, unless you own Dubai.

WHY BOTHER? The salesclerks are nice, the music they play is bouncy, and even if the price of a sneaker could pay your rent, you will leave the store amazed at what this design team can do with a sweatshirt.

WILL BOTHER. The salesclerks are nice, the music they play is bouncy, and even if the price of a sneaker could pay your rent, you will leave the store amazed at what this design team can do with a sweatshirt.

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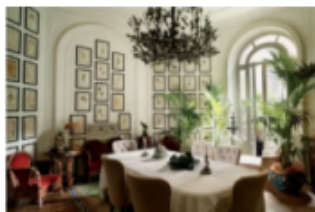
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